Today and Tomorrow . . By Walter Lippmann

The President in Paris

IF, AS IS being said, there is a crisis in NATO, the issue is not the Atlantic Alliance itself, or any movement within NATO to surrender Berlin, and Germany, and Europe. The basic issues in NATO are strategy and command. Can the European members continue to rely for their defense upon the American nuclear deterrent under the command of the American President and an American general?

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This question can be explored but it cannot be settled by the NATO foreign ministers at Oslo. Unless I am much mistaken, it will be the central subject of the serious discussions when President Kennedy visits President de Gaulle.

THESE discussions will not be easy, and it would be a great pity if the Administration built up any public expectation, which would almost certainly be false, that there are going to be settlements at Paris. The best that anyone has a right to hope for is that the two Presidents will reach a preliminary understanding of each other, and can therefore lay the foundations for those changes in the strategy and structure of NATO which are necessary.

If I understand the problem after a number of careful talks in Paris, it is the consequence of the change in the balance of power since the Soviet Union achieved nuclear parity. The NATO strategical doctrine antedates this historic change. The NATO military establishment, which was founded under General Eisenhower and is now commanded by General Norstad, has been regarded as the "shield." It was to hold the Red Army at bay while the United States wielded the decisive weapon, which was then our monopoly, the "sword" which is the nuclear strategic air force.

THIS STRATEGIC conception has been radically undermined by the Soviet nuclear missile forces. The most authoritative Eureopean view is that since the Soviet Union is now capable of inflicting prohibitive damage on the United States, and absolute damage on the small European countries, the automatic collective defense, which NATO presupposes, cannot be counted upon. The French view, which is merely more articulate than that of the other Europeans, is that if nuclear war begins, no nation will commit suicide if it can escape it. An American President cannot be expected to sacrifice Chicago for Lyons or New York for Paris.

This is the root of the French insistence upon having their own deterrent. They do not pretend to think that they can deter attack anywhere except against French cities. Rightly or wrongly, the French intend to have under their own command, not under the American President's command, the nuclear power to destroy two or three Soviet cities if French cities are threatened.

I shall be very much astonished if the President can argue General de Gaulle out of this view, or if he can induce him to alter it by any device for a collective control of missiles by NATO which leaves the ultimate and fateful decision in the United States.

THIS IS the crux of the problem. But, of course, it is not the whole problem. There is the exceedingly important French insistence that in great affairs throughout the world — the Formosa Strait, Indo-China, Iran, the Congo, Cuba — policy should be made by French-British-American agreement, and not unilaterally by the United States.

Though I tried hard to understand just what this means, I am not sure I do. I am not sure how much of it is an appeal for consultation, which is so necessary and so desirable, and how much of it conceals the principle of unanimous agreement, that is to say the veto.

IT IS TRUE that in the field of political consultation, the Kennedy Administration has done better than its predecessor, and that communication between the two governments, both in Washington and in Paris, is, happily, much more open. But it would be misleading to say that the atmosphere is as cordial as it needs to be, or that trust and confidence between the two governments have not in recent years been seriously impaired.

Seen from our side, the reason for this has been, of course, the great disagreement with General de Gaulle over the military structure of NATO and over the independent French nuclear bomb. Seen from the French side, there is not only a general sense of grievance that France, as compared with Great Britain, has been ignored. There is not only a firm conviction that President Eisenhower broke his promise to support France in Algeria, and instructed our delegation to abstain in the United Nations.

There are also uglier irritations of which I shall with some discretion cite two examples that I have verified. There is a specific case where an American manufacturer of missiles has been allowed to give to the Germans, but prohibited from giving to the French, highly secret—although non-nuclear technical information. This kind of thing is poisonous in an alliance, and there is reason to hope that it and similar cases are being studied and will be reformed.

THE OTHER case is very delicate because it involves the CIA, which is so generally beleaguered. But our people have a right to know this. The reason why the French Government has not really exculpated the CIA of encouraging the Algerian rebel generals is that it was already so angry with the CIA for meddling in French internal politics. The French grievance justified or not, has to do with recent French legislation for the French nuclear weapon, and the alleged effort of CIA agents to interfere with that legislation.

The President will need to know about these things before he goes to Paris.